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### ***NEWS RELEASE***

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### **Rep. Nethercutt sees shift toward engagement in Bush's Cuba initiative**

WASHINGTON – Responding to President Bush's "Initiative for a New Cuba," U.S. Rep. George Nethercutt (R-Wash.) said he shares President Bush's goals of making Cuba a free and democratic nation, but suggested the Administration go farther in its initiatives to reach that goal.

"Today, on Cuban Independence Day, the president called for freedom for the people of Cuba. I share his goal, but believe a new approach is required. We have failed the people of Cuba miserably in promoting freedom through the policies of the last four decades. Rather than again defending this tired approach, we need to look forward. Two years ago, Congress took this first step by lifting prohibitions on the sale of food to Cuba. President Bush tacitly acknowledged this change and importantly, did not call for new sanctions or restrictions on the island.

"The president today acknowledged that freedom within Cuba is likely to be achieved in a step-by-step fashion, a marked shift from Helms-Burton policy which calls for total regime change before any reciprocal action can be offered by the United States.

"The Cuba Working Group has set forward a list of proposals that will allow continued forward momentum that benefits the people of Cuba. I urge the Administration to work with us to realize these proposals.

"Already, the president has acknowledged two of the propositions we put forth last week in our Policy Review. In his speech today he called for a modernization of Radio Marti and for scholarships to allow Cubans to come to the United States. Both proposals were contained in our report and indicate the Administration's willingness to work cooperatively for the benefit of the Cuban people.

"The President threatened to veto any legislation that would allow taxpayer dollars to go to Cuba, apparently opposing public financing of food sales to Havana. I do not support public financing, and indeed current law properly forbids U.S. government financing of food shipments.

**--MORE--**

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"I believe the President's words are important, though no taxpayer dollars are at risk with private financing arrangements, of the sort most recently considered in the Farm Bill Conference. Private entities should be allowed to make the decision whether or not to finance their sales to Cuba -- this is the heart of free enterprise, and federal restrictions advantage no one."

Nethercutt sponsored the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act signed into law in October 2000, which lifted agricultural and medical sanctions on Cuba, Iran, Libya and Sudan.

A founding member of the Cuba Working Group, enabling private financing for agriculture sales has been one of Nethercutt's top priorities for change in Cuba policy.

"I look forward to working with President Bush to advance many of the initiatives he proposed today to improve our relationship with the people of Cuba."

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